

## Message Text

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00202 132214Z

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 688  
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
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UNCLAS QUEBEC 202

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT, CA  
SUBJ: FALL ELECTIONS IN QUEBEC?

1. ELECTION FEVER HAS BEGUN TO INFECT POLITICALLY AWARE CIRCLES IN QUEBEC. DISCUSSIONS ARE LONG AND ANIMATED IN BAR ROOMS AND BOARD ROOMS THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE ARGUING THE PROS AND CONS OF WHETHER BOURASSA WILL OR WILL NOT HOLD A FALL ELECTION THIS YEAR. PUNDIT STATUS IS ACCORDED BY THEIR PEERS TO THOSE WHO CAN DEMONSTRATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARCANE ELECTORAL LAW AS IT MIGHT EFFECT THE TIMING OF SUCH AN ELECTION.
2. HONORS FOR MOST PRECISE PREDICTION GOES TO PQ ORGANIZER AND PARTY WHIP, MARCEL LEGER, WHO RECENTLY TOLD PRESS THAT "ALL INDICATORS LEAD OBSERVERS TO CONCLUDE THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE ANNOUNCED AT THE END OF AUGUST AND VOTING DAY WILL BE SEPTEMBER 29." ACCORDINGLY, PQ PARTY CADRES HAVE BEEN INFORMED TO PREPARE FOR SUCH AN ELECTION. ANOTHER PRIVATE, BUT WELL INFORMED, HANDICAPER HAS PREDICTED WITH EQUAL CONFIDENCE THAT NEXT ELECTION WILL BE NOVEMBER 15 OR 16.
3. FEW OBSERVERS APPEAR PLACE MUCH FAITH IN PREMIER BOURASSA'S DENIAL THAT HE INTENDS HOLD ELECTION THIS YEAR POINTING OUT THAT HE MADE SAME DENIALS BEFORE CALLING 1973 ELECTION. ONE PROMINENT EXCEPTION IS MONTREAL GAZETTE COLUMNIST IAN MACDONALD WHO SEES PREMIER'S DECISION TO PROCEED WITH PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY OF OLYMPICS AS "CERTAIN SIGN" FALL ELECTION HAS BEEN

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00202 132214Z

"CALLED OFF."

4. THOSE, LIKE LE SOLEIL'S GILBERT ATHOT, WHO CONTEND FALL ELECTION IS NOW VIRTUALLY CERTAIN CITE FACTORS TO SUPPORT THEIR CONTENTION SUCH AS:

- A) LINGERING OLYMPIC EUPHORIA
- B) CURRENT DISARRAY OF POTENTIAL "THIRD FORCE" ELEMENTS
- C) PREDICTIONS THAT LOCAL ECONOMY MAY NOT BE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED BY NEXT YEAR, AND THAT THERE MAY BE MORE RATHER THAN FEWER UNEMPLOYED IN PROVINCE
- D) GROWING STRENGTH OF PQ ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS IN RURAL AREAS
- E) GOVERNMENT'S NEED TO GAIN POPULAR MANDATE IN ORDER DEAL MORE FORCIBLY WITH PUBLIC SECTOR DISPUTES
- F) BOURASSA'S WISH AVOID "CRYSTALIZATION" OF GROWING DISCONTENT, PARTICULARLY AMONG YOUNG LIBERALS AND
- G) THE ANTICIPATION THAT NEXT YEAR'S PROVINCIAL BUDGET WILL BE THE TOUGHEST SINCE THE PREMIER TOOK OFFICE OWNING MAINLY TO THE JOINT IMPACT OF OLYMPIC DEFICITS, AND LARGE PUBLIC SECTOR WAGE RISES AND REDUCED FEDERAL SUBVENTIONS.

5. SEMI-PRIVATELY A NUMBER OF PARTY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CONFIDE THAT BOURASSA WILL MAKE HIS FINAL DECISION ON BASIS OUTCOME OF UPCOMING PROVINCIAL PREMIERS MEETING IN ALBERTA. DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS, ARTHUR TREMBLAY AND DIRGEN OF INTERPROVINCIAL AFFAIRS, FRANCOIS LEBRUN, HAVE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM VISIT TO OTHER PROVINCES WHERE THEY ATTEMPTED EXPLAIN AND GATHER SUPPORT FOR QUEBEC'S POSITION ON REPATRIATION ISSUE. UNDERSTAND LEVEL OF SYMPATHY FOR QUEBEC POSITION WAS HIGHEST IN ALBERTA.

6. SOME SAY, SHOULD OUTCOME OF PREMIER'S CONFERENCE BE FAVORABLE TO QUEBEC, BOURASSA WILL CALL ELECTION WHEN HE RETURNS FROM CONFERENCE. OTHERS CONTEND HE WILL CALL ELECTION IF HE GETS NO SUPPORT ON GROUNDS HE NEEDS CLEAR MANDATE CONFRONT TRUDEAU AND ANGLOPHONES ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE OF ADEQUATE PROTECTION FOR QUEBEC'S "CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY". BOTH COULD BE RIGHT.

7. AS REGARDS THE INFLUENCE OF THE ELECTORAL LAW ON THE TIMING OF A FALL ELECTION, THERE IS DEFINITELY A PERIOD DURING WHICH AN ELECTION MAY NOT BE HELD. THIS IS THE ANNUAL CENSUS PERIOD REQUIRED TO PURIFY ELECTORAL ROLLS. UNDER THE ELECTION ACT OF JULY 1975 AS AMENDED IN APRIL 1976, ELECTION MAY NOT BE HELD FOR SIX WEEKS FOLLOWING THE BEGINNING OF ACTUAL ENUMERATION.

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00202 132214Z

RATION. SINCE THE CENSUS TAKING WILL BEGIN THIS YEAR ON OCTOBER 4, VOTING IS NOT LEGALLY PERMISSABLE PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 15. OTHERWISE, AN ELECTION IS LEGALLY FEASIBLE PRIOR TO OCTOBER 4 OR AFTER NOVEMBER 15 WITH AN ALLOWABLE CAMPAIGNING PERIOD OF FROM 32-35 DAYS AFTER THE ISSUANCE OF ELECTION WRITS. IM COMMENT: THUS, AN ELECTION IN LATE SEPTEMBER/EARLY OCTOBER OR IN LATE NOVEMBER IS POSSIBLE AND NOW SEEMS PROBABLE TO MOST OBSERVERS INCLUDING YOUR CORRESPONDANT. LIBERAL ELECTO-

RAL PROSPECTS ARE UNLIKELY TO IMPROVE BY NEXT YEAR AND COULD  
WORSEN. ALTHOUGH RECENT POLLS INDICATE A LARGE UNDECIDED  
VOTE (30 PERCENT), MOST REASONABLY OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS BELIEVE  
THE MAJORITY OF THESE WAIVERING VOTERS WOULD STILL VOTE LIBERAL  
SINCE THE "THIRD FORCE" --HAS NOT YET MATERIALIZED AND  
UNDERLYING FEAR OF AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE UNDER A SEREPERATIST  
P.Q. CONTINUES TO HAVE STRONG THOUGH DECLINING DERTERENT FORCE.  
MCNAMARA

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